

SANTA BARBARA IDEA LAB DEBRIEF

Background:

The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission's Youth Innovation Committee was formed in February 2019 to identify unmet mental health needs of California youth and to identify opportunities for innovation. The Committee is made up of 14 members, ages 15-25, from 12 different California counties. The Committee worked with the Youth Leadership Institute, the Born This Way Foundation, California Youth Connection, The Children's Trust and others to gather research, host focus groups and to conduct a statewide survey to better understand opportunities to improve mental wellness of young people. After a deep dive into the research, the Committee chose to focus on using innovation and youth-led approaches to increase preventative mental health services in schools.

The purpose of an IDEA Lab is to provide an opportunity for committee members to work with local youth and adult allies to explore innovative solutions that counties can test to increase preventative mental health services in schools.

The first IDEA Lab was hosted at UC Santa Barbara on Friday, December 6, 2019 and was a collaboration between the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission's Youth Innovation Committee, All Children Thrive, and Santa Barbara County Department of Behavioral Wellness, with support and participation from Ventura, Kern, Imperial, and San Luis Obispo counties.

Event Summary:

The Santa Barbara IDEA Lab was a shining example of youth engagement in conversations on mental health. Over 150 youth advocates and adult allies from the above counties attended the event, including students, county representatives, mental health professionals, teachers, parents, and school administrators. With adults in a listening and support role, youth voices were fully heard, and their ideas flourished into what became a productive and innovative discussion.

Local Santa Barbara youth curated various thematic art pieces as part of the event. Each art piece addressed a different problem faced by youth in schools. Groups were formed through the members' mutual interests in their chosen thematic art piece. There were 15 groups established, with about 10 members per table excluding Youth Innovation Committee members, All Children Thrive staff, and Commission staff who helped facilitate and scribe the groups' conversations.

The bulk of the day was spent on a Power Mapping activity, the goal of which was to facilitate a discussion between youth advocates and adult allies to conceptualize a youth-centered innovation in California's mental health system. By bringing together youth and adult allies' lived experiences, diverse expertise, and varying levels of power, the groups collaboratively imagined improved iterations of the solutions proposed in the thematic art pieces, known as "sprouted concepts." In other words, through the youth-led discussions held during this activity, the original solution to a given problem faced by youth in schools evolves into a more developed innovative concept that may improve mental health outcomes in schools.

At the end of the activity, each group shared their sprouted concept with the entire audience. Out of the 15 sprouted concepts that emerged from these discussions, there were some reoccurring themes including: the implementation of a more robust mental health curriculum in classes; youth wellness centers/zones; student voice committees; and increased access to counseling/support services on campuses.

Next Steps:

There will be two more IDEA Labs in early 2020. Based on county interest, there is a planned collaboration with Yolo, Solano, Sacramento, Nevada and Placer counties to host the second youth innovation IDEA Lab in March 2020, and later with Shasta, Trinity, Tehama and surrounding counties to host the third in April 2020. Ultimately, the three regional IDEA Labs are intended to serve as an incubator for youth-generated innovative solutions focused on preventative mental health services in schools that counties can eventually implement into individual or multi-county projects. The results and artwork from all three IDEA Labs will be showcased in a Youth Innovation Summit in Summer 2020.